

THE TELEGRAPH WIRE

ISSUE 18

COMICS
& CONIX

FREE!



Special STAR COMICS Preview!

Interview with Tom DeFalco, Sid Jacobson and Larry Hama.



for Diana...

This issue's FIT TO BE TIED logo is brought to you courtesy of Valentino. Thanks for being normal, man! Please remember to send all press releases, letters of comment, logo designs, Christmas parcels, and a new dresser to: THE TELEGRAPH WIRE, 69 Carnation Road, Levittown, NY, 11756.

Well, readers, here I am finally settled into my new suburban digs in Levittown. As I write, it's a chilly autumn day here on Long Island. The trees are a mass of colors: blazing reds and oranges, peppered with a few green leaves still pretending that winter isn't right around the corner. I'd forgotten how beautiful the fall is in the east. It used to be my favorite season, with its shifting hues and powerful winds. After three years in California--three years of summer as an almost perennial climate--the concept of season had just about lost its meaning altogether.

I'd also forgotten what it means to live in the suburbs: houses and lawns and families and (sometimes nosy) neighbors. Not to mention a transit system that's for the birds--though what use *they* might have for it is beyond me! Living in the Berkeley community these last three years also meant that I was privy to all the amenities of a university town, such as several photocopy centers and a variety of local printers. Not so in Levittown, I'm afraid. You'll notice, for example, that this issue of the WIRE contains no photographs. That's because I have yet to find a local printer who can half-tone photos on an 85-line screen. Hopefully by next issue this situation will have resolved itself as I become a little more familiar with my new surroundings. 'Til then, please bear with me and my limited facilities.

I was going to tell you all about how hard it is to find an apartment on Long Island, or in New York generally. And I thought Berkeley had a housing problem! Bay Area residents don't realize how

available and reasonable accommodation actually is in their part of the country--comparatively speaking, of course. However, since I am now more or less comfortably ensconced in my new place--only after much tearing of hair, mind you--let me tell you, instead, about the lack of another extremely important amenity in my suburban neighborhood: good comic shops!

With 52 direct sales shops in the greater Bay Area alone, I quickly became used to comic stores on virtually every block. Now that might be a little too much to ask for, granted, but one would hope that the local shops might be at least comprehensively stocked. Eclipse Publisher Dean Mullaney claims I've been spoiled by Comics & Comix, and perhaps he's right. Certainly, in my travels across both the U.S. and Canada, I've seen *nothing* to compare with the seven-store California-based C&C chain. In terms of product availability, variety, and organization, C&C is the comics consumer's dream come true.

Now, I'm not asking for a wall full of Japanese robots and models or for a Dungeons & Dragons display, though these are the kinds of new product lines that a wise comics retailer will branch into. I'm not even that interested in back issues, having long ago abandoned my collector fetishism--with the exception of old romance comics, admittedly. But *new* product--I can't live without *new* comics!

The one comics store in Levittown--the only store to service a population of 80,000 no less--consists of three spin racks. *Three spin racks!* One for Marvels, one for DCs, and one for independents.

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 issue, produced under great duress, is for Millie and her son, who helped make the transition east a bit smoother.
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Its stock of independents is especially low and if the store has sold out of its ten copies of the new **ROCKETEER SPECIAL EDITION**, well, you're out of luck, pal. I did manage to find the recently-released **WILL EISNER'S QUARTERLY #3**, but only after some heavy searching behind several beat up copies of old **STARLOGS** stacked away in a dark corner. Back issues? Forget it!

In nearby Wantagh, the situation is somewhat better. The store in that area offers a small selection at least of back issues, five spin racks plus a few counter displays of new comics, a couple of shelves of fanzines, and a subscription service. Unfortunately, as in the Levittown case, the Wantagh store has little room to work with and, consequently, it's a bit of a chore to search out the week's new comics in the shop's cramped quarters.

Luckily I was able, on one occasion, to make the long trip to Forbidden Planet in Manhattan. FP at least is well stocked with new comics and new comics-related product--not to mention Japanese toys, role-playing games, science fiction paperbacks, imported European graphic novels, and more. Otherwise, I might have missed out entirely on **THE COMICS JOURNAL #93** and, contained therein, Mark Burbey's excellent **SWAMP THING** interviews with Alan Moore, Steve Bissette, and John Totleben.

What this situation reveals to me is the growing need for a nationwide retailers' association. In the last six months, Bay Area comics dealers have formed an organization designed to better serve their own needs and the needs of the consumer through increased communication, shared ideas, and joint promotion. The Northern California Comic Dealers Association meets once a month and its members have already begun to profit from the monthly discussions. And the gains in knowledge--in terms, generally, of how to run one's business more effectively--are passed on directly to you, the consumer. A similar organization in Southern California has been in existence for an even longer time. New York area retailers might be wise to take a hint from their west coast cousins. Certainly the formation of a local dealers' association could only help the current situation. And ultimately, with enough local chapters springing up all over the country, a national organization could eventually be formed that would benefit every comics retailer throughout the U.S. The comics retail business has come a long way from the days of high school bartering in someone's dusty old garage. Some stores, unfortunately, are slower to realize this than others.

In the meantime, where does that leave ye editor? Luckily, a little bird must have chirped out my plight to some of the right people as I have recently found myself the grateful recipient of free comic books from a number of independent publishers. Dean Mullaney and cat yronwode of Eclipse Comics are now sending complimentary copies my way of all their titles--meaning that I don't have to worry about missing out on that **ROCKETEER SPECIAL EDITION** anymore or the delightfully unique and bizarre **STRANGE DAYS**, not to mention the much-anticipated **MASKEO MAN**. Denis Loubert surprised me recently with an Aardvark-Vanahelm car package containing new issues of **CEREBUS**, **MS. TREE**, and the wonderfully offbeat **FLAMING CARROT COMICS**. Comico's Phil Lasorda sent me my fix of **MAGE #4** and **ELEMENTALS #2**--the latter of which, by the way, has already completely sold out of its print run. I have Fred Todd of Rip Off Press to thank for the new color issue of **THE FABULOUS FURRY FREAK BROTHERS**. Old I mention that underground comix are *nowhere* to be found in the New

York vicinity? David A. Kraft was kind enough to mail the current issue of **COMICS INTERVIEW**, satisfying my need for commentary from four-color creators. And last but not least, Richard and Wendy Pini have been sending me every **WarPr** publication for the past year or so--now what would I have done without **MYTH-ADVENTURES #3**? Hara-kiri may seem a little drastic to the non-gocossentist, but you devoted fans of good comics know what I'm talking about!

It's especially gratifying to me to see that it is the smaller publishers who are going out of their way to keep me in comics. These are the people who can least afford to put me on their complimentary list--I guess it just goes to show that even though their operations are small, these folks are big-hearted. My warmest thanks to each of the above. Not only are you helping to keep my sanity intact, but you're also making it possible for me to continue to do my job properly. If I were still in California, I'd send you all your very own little palm tree to plant in your backyard.

Palm trees! God, I miss them. Now if some enterprising young businessperson could only find a way to import these to the east coast, all would be right with the world.

Some of you have wondered about **THE TELEGRAPH WIRE**'s east coast move. As I've explained to "T.M. Maple" in this issue's letter column, the **WIRE** is still published and distributed by Comics & Comix. It is still a California-based promotional magazine and will attempt to deliver more of a local flavor than other national fanzines. The only change is that I am no longer working out of **C&C's Berkeley office**, but instead producing the **WIRE** here in New York, while still maintaining close contact with my **C&C co-workers**. Thanks to AT&T and the U.S. Postal Service, it's amazing how easily this is accomplished. And it's just the editorial office that's moved; I'm also handling the advertising and subscriptions from this end of the country. The more things change...

As to why I gave up sunny California for the chilly shores of Long Island, well, affairs of the heart have been known to lead a gal to do some strange things!

Now is as good a time as any to mention one significant change regarding the **WIRE**. Beginning this issue, we are increasing our print run from 5000 to 7000 copies. Thanks to Gary Berman and Adam Malin of Creation Conventions, the extra 2000 copies of each issue will be given out free at various Creation Cons in the east. This issue, in fact, will be distributed at Creation's Thanksgiving Convention in New York City. The other 5000 copies of each issue will go out, as per usual, through Comics & Comix in California and through our subscription mailing list. What this means is that the **WIRE** now has national distribution--or, at least, east and west coast circulation. I'm still working on the middle of the country!

'Til next time, keep those cards and letters coming. This is going to be my first real winter in 11 years and your words will help keep me warm throughout the cold months ahead. Do jot down the new address if you haven't already: **THE TELEGRAPH WIRE**, 69 Carnation Road, Levittown, NY, 11756. Or call me--between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. EST if you want me to be polite--at: 516-731-0765. Happy Holidays!

ECCENTRIC EVOLUTIONS

by JOHN BARRETT
PUBLISHER

THIS IS NO WAY TO RUN A BUSINESS

I find winter depressing. This wasn't always the case. Before I was in business for myself I loved the rainy season because it had no real effect on my sense of security. Now it is synonymous with a slow-down of sales.

This year is especially gloomy for me as the summer results were less than we anticipated. Comics and Comix' toy, game, and miscellaneous lines of merchandise did well, but our new comics volume was far below what we expected. After careful examination, we deduced that the problem resulted from the lack of expected product. In August, \$15,000 less than we ordered in new comic titles actually shipped. By September the figure had grown to \$23,000. The shortfall ranged from 23-40% of our individual stores' total orders!

This drastic failing has wreaked havoc with our budget. For example, if our salary budget is 20% of our gross sales and we expect sales of \$50,000, then we would budget \$10,000 for salaries. If our sales turned out to be just \$40,000, then our salary budget should have been only \$8,000, meaning we have overspent by \$2,000 in that one category of expenses alone. This is in effect what we experienced this summer. We have taken internal steps to correct the problem, but the side-effects will be felt for the next year.

Who caused the problem? There is no easy answer. Certainly there were books involved from virtually every comics publisher. The delays stemmed from a multitude of problems, including and starting with creators' failures to meet their deadlines (some missed by miles!), printers' strikes, unrealistic scheduling, cash-flow problems, and more.

The independents' contribution to this mess was disproportionately high, with the big "winner" being the now-defunct Pacific Comics. First Comics is blameless, but the other members of this group seem to lack the clout to get their contributors to meet deadlines. This is a personal plea to all you artists, writers, colorists, letterers, editors, etc. Please bear down and finish your projects on time. I'm not suggesting you let the quality slip, but be-

fore you enter into any new commitments, take a realistic look at your workload. Comics buyers are a demanding lot and even the best quality cannot make up for continually skipped shipping dates--if you don't believe me, take a poll of retailers on RONIN and CAMELOT 3000! I extend this word of caution to the smaller publishers: Don't over-expand. This isn't the Oklahoma landrush; there will be plenty of good properties available later, provided we don't kill the golden goose now!

DC Comics, certainly the greater culprit of the "big two", with constant delays in such key titles as CAMELOT and TEEN TITANS, has indicated it is moving to correct its delay problems: a greater emphasis is now being placed on the importance of shipping schedules and DC's business staff, as represented by Paul Levitz, is more involved in scheduling than before. Levitz was responsible for shipping schedules from 1976 to 1981 and claims to have had only one late title release during that period. Both Marvel and DC are guilty of late shippings on many of their annuals. These delays particularly hurt as we ordered the annuals heavily for the summer months when new comic sales are traditionally the highest. Now they are selling slowly and we face large bills with decreased income!

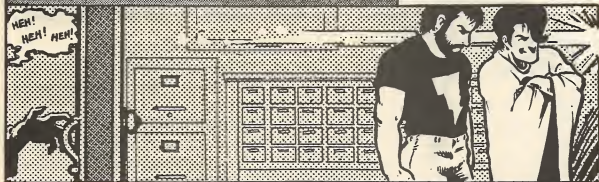
There is a bright side. The titles we have received, for the most part, are selling better than we anticipated since there is less competition now for display space and available dollars. The bad side is that some of you customers are missing out on books you normally pick up since the books have sold out by the time you make it into your local store. (You might check out our Comic Saver service to help avoid this problem in the future.) Unfortunately, we can't risk increasing our orders drastically to offset this condition: no sooner would we do that than a glut of the late titles would show up and we would be up to our ears in paper--not the green kind either!

As I said at the outset of this column, winter depresses. Today it is in the high 70s and sunny, although the weatherman assures us rain is on the way. Thank God I don't live in Denver!

Comics & Comix

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You think maybe you're about to "outgrow" comics.

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Before you lose your
sense of wonder.

MAIN LINES

by R. "Scoop" Schreck

On September 15th of this year, the Association of Comic Art Publishers (ACAP) held its first meeting in New York City. Hosted by DC Comics, with most of the major publishing representatives in attendance, the newly-formed association laid out its objectives: first, to foster and disseminate the best possible image of the comic medium to the general public, and second, to promote the increased sales and markets of members' publications. The second meeting of ACAP is scheduled to coincide with Glenwood's January retailers' meeting in Las Vegas.

David Kraft's COMICS INTERVIEW #16 will feature DC's LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES with writer Paul Levitz and new LSH artist Dan Jurgens discussing the changes they have planned for the title.

Issue #16 will also present the first word on the definitive OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE--according to George Dishevsky, master of Marvel Indexes.

THE BARREN EARTH, the six-page back-up in DC's WARLORD, becomes a four-issue mini-series this November. Although the creative team of Cohn and Randall remains the same, the title has been slightly changed: look for CONQUEROR OF THE BARREN EARTH when perusing the racks.

Another four-issue mini-series from DC Comics is now in the pre-production stages. Writer Neal Pozner and artist Craig Hamilton plan to take a longtime DC



(C) DC Comics Inc.

Aquaman gets a new look in his upcoming mini-series.

mainstay and try to breathe some new life into his tired old aqua-lungs. Of course, it's Aquaman! Along with a new costume, according to DC's press release the King of the Seven Seas "will be portrayed as a character with depth and insight." (A character with *depth*?!) The mini-series will, to some extent, explore the relationship between Aquaman and his brother, the Ocean Master.

This is DC Design Director Pozner's first comic book as a writer. Artist Craig Hamilton has illustrated several comic books, including parts of WHO'S WHO: THE DEFINITIVE DIRECTORY OF THE DC UNIVERSE. This is his first series assignment.

FREAK BROTHERS #8 hit the stands in late October, so if you don't already have it, get it! This is the first full color issue of the fabulous, furry FREAK BROS. ever produced, with plans for two more all-color issues to follow. The current issue recaps the "Idiots Abroad" story begun in RIP OFF #11 and continues it as Freewheelin' Franklin is captured by pirates, Phineas makes an involuntary pilgrimage to Mecca, and Fat Freddy gets involved with international terrorists!

Eclipse Comics has picked up more titles originally scheduled to be published by the now-defunct Pacific Comics.

After four issues at Pacific, the six-issue SOMERSET HOLMES will be concluded at Eclipse. Issue #5 will go to press in November, according to Eclipse Publisher Dean Mullaney, with #6 following in December. The price and format will remain unchanged from the Pacific version of the title. SOMERSET HOLMES is written by Bruce Jones and April Campbell, with art by Brent Anderson.

Two more of the Bruce Jones properties, ALIEN WORLDS and TWISTED TALES, will be concluding their run at Eclipse with issues 9 and 10, respectively. The last two issues of ALIEN will host work by John Bolton, Rand Holmes, Ken Steacy, and Al Williamson, among others. TWISTED's final two issues will feature the talents of Gray Morrow, John Foun, Val



(C) DC Comics Inc.

Mayerik, and more.

Shipping in January will be MR. MONSTER #1 by Michael Gilbert and Bill Messner-Loebis. The first 10 pages of MR. MONSTER appeared in Pacific's VANGUARD ILLUSTRATED. The Eclipse version will print the entire series, reprinting the first part with new color separations.

The 4th issue of SUN-RUNNERS, a star-spanning science fiction adventure by Roger McKenzie and Pat Broderick, will also be published by Eclipse. This features the "Mike Mahogany" back-up series by McKenzie and artist Paul Smith. Negotiations are underway for future issues in the series.

And last, but far from least, beginning in February '85, Eclipse will be distributing the delightfully offbeat TALES OF THE BEANWORLD, published by Larry Marder. Described by Eclipse Editor-in-Chief cat yronwade as an "ecological romance," BEANWORLD will be a black-and-white \$1.50 comic with color covers.

Frank Miller is writing, penciling, and inking a 64-page Marvel Graphic Novel titled ELEKTRA: ACT OF LOVE. Miller promises that the graphic novel will answer every question about Elektra since her last appearance in DAREDEVIL. While Matt Murdock will appear, he won't be in superhero costume. Bullseye, the villain who killed Elektra in DAREDEVIL #181, will also appear and play a very pivotal role.

Lynn Varley will color the novel, Jim Novak will letter, and Al Milgrom will edit.

Contrary to what was reported last issue, Miller will not be collaborating with Bill Sienkiewicz on DAREDEVIL #219 and #220. The two may, instead, take



The origin of Slash, from COYOTE #11.

(C) Stephen Englehart; artwork (C) McFarlane and Nichols

up the Vanessa/Kingpin storyline in the form of a graphic novel, with Miller writing and Sienkiewicz drawing. Nothing has yet been confirmed on this score.

Penciller Todd McFarlane and inker Art Nichols join Steve Englehart to present the origin of "Slash", the back-up feature in COYOTE #11. Art is a local Sacramento boy whose first professional inking job can be seen in the Ditko-penned "Ojinn" back-up in COYOTE #9. Welcome to the big time, Art!

ROCKET RACCOON, a four-issue mini-series scheduled to debut in late January '85, will be written by Bill Mantlo, with artwork by two more local talents: Mike Mignola on pencils and Al Gordon on inks.

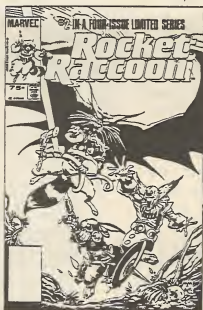
SWORDS OF THE SWASHBUCKLERS, a Marvel Graphic Novel, is set to ship in December. Also written by Bill Mantlo, the novel will be drawn by Jackson (Butch) Guice.

Epic Comics has announced a 12-issue limited series titled MOONSHADOW. Written by J.M. De Matteis and illustrated by Jay Muth, the series is scheduled to begin in January '85. In MOONSHADOW readers will find a 15-year old protagonist searching the cosmos for swashbuckling adventure and romance, a cat named Frodo, scores of weird aliens, and some of the most beautiful artwork to ever hit the pages of a comic book.

Marvel's Star line of children's comics is set to debut with a real snap, crackle, and pop! Along with an incredible direct market promotional campaign, including a 100% co-op reimbursement for any print,



(C) Marvel Comics Group



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The first three covers to the four-issue ROCKET RACCOON limited series, written by Bill Mantlo, pencilled by Mike Mignola, and inked by Al Gordon.

even more in '84

monthly

Cerebus



Ms. Tree

Journey



bimonthly



Normalman

Neil the Horse



Flaming Carrot

twice yearly

Swords of Cerebus

Aardvark Vanaheim

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a time...



A
fairy tale
for grown-ups

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radio, or TV advertising by retailers spotlighting the Star Line, Marvel Comics will be involved in an even more widespread promotion with the General Mills Corporation. Eight million boxes of Lucky Charms and Cocoa Puffs cereals will feature a special offer showing WALLY THE WIZARD, STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE, PLANET TERRY, HEALTHCLIFF, and TOP DOG. Any person sending in three qualifying UPC symbols from boxes of these cereals will receive the first issues of all five books. Television commercials advertising both cereals will include a tagline for the Star Comics promotion from mid-December through mid-January, giving Marvel a full month of national publicity. Similar promotion sure didn't hurt the sales of G.I. JOE! That's gold in them thar bowls!

Aardvark-Vanaheim has scheduled a special 24-page 3-D sampler for Christmas release. It will contain six four-page stories by Dave Sim, Arn Saba, Valentino, Bill Loeb, Bob Burden, and Terry Beatty and Max Collins.

A-V has also announced a new title. CEREBUS JAM is a black-and-white bimonthly, due to debut sometime in 1985. Each issue will contain stories by Dave Sim and Gerhard as well as a guest artist (as in SWORDS OF CEREBUS).

In other A-V news, the next two MS. TREE serials, "Skin Deep" (#14 and #15) and "Runaway" (#16 and #17), are being designed as "built-in MS. TREE samplers," according to writer and co-creator Max Collins. Because the MS. TREE stories have heretofore been serialized graphic novels, running the course of as many as six issues, the creator feels that some readers might like to give the book a try but are reluctant to commit to such a lengthy run of issues. Consequently, "Skin Deep" and "Runaway" are shorter to give new readers an opportunity to sample the private eye's warps in a compact, two-issue package.

Two First Comics publications, WARP and MARS, have been cancelled. WARP #19 is the last issue of that title, however First will maintain at least some publishing rights to WARP, having already made arrangements with the WARP movie producers to handle

the adaptation. First's final issue of MARS will be #12, shipping the fourth week of November.

The good news is that former Capital properties NEXUS and THE BADGER have been added to the First Comics line-up. With the creative team of Baron and Rude continuing at the helm, NEXUS goes monthly with issue #7, shipping in December. In addition to maintaining the previous numbering system, First will also be maintaining the printing and coloring format. Les Dorscheid will continue as the book's colorist, however the inking and lettering tasks will be taken over by Eric Shanower as of issue #8. Rick Oliver will be editing the book.

THE BADGER will begin as a bimonthly publication with issue #5, due to be released in January. Joining creator Mike Baron on the adventures of his unpredictable superhero are penciller Bill Reinhold and inker Jeff Dee.

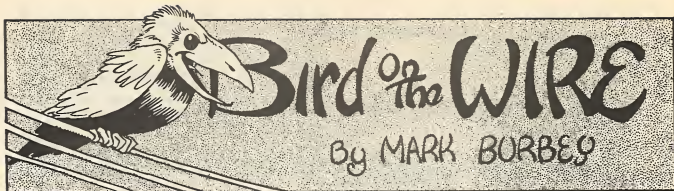
THE BLACK FLAME will be featured in a special book-length story this December, according to First's Managing Editor Mike Gold. If the special is well-received, First will follow it up with a regular series, possibly by late summer '85. The special issue is titled "Land of the Dreamers" and written by Peter Gillis with artwork by Tom Sutton and Don Lomax.

Writer Nicola Cuti will be returning to his co-creation, E-MAN. Cuti created the title with artist Joe Staton for Charlton Comics in 1973. When First Comics revived the title ten years later, Cuti was unavailable due to his ongoing commitments to DC Comics. Cuti's first script will appear in E-MAN #24, on sale in February. The story reveals the heretofore untold secret origin of Michael Mauser.

December will see the release of Fantagraphics' special preview issue of AMAZING HEROES featuring a cover by Jaime Hernandez and 148 pages of information on what's in store for 1985. Also scheduled for December is volume one of THE DITKO COLLECTIDN, with twelve MR. A stories, rare Ditko illustrations, and an introduction by editor Robin Snyder.



(c) First Comics, Inc.



The deaths of Phil Seuling and Don Newton, within two days of each other, shook up both fans and professionals more than anything else since the suicide of Wallace Wood. It seems like a lot of people connected with comics have been dying recently—a sad realization to ponder.

One never knows what to say in response to such tragic inevitabilities. The thing about the death of a comics professional, such as Don Newton, or Sol Brodsky, or Howard Nostrand, or Wally Wood, or Gene Day, or a "big name fan" such as Phil Seuling or Ben Pondexter, is that we feel like we've lost a friend. Despite the fact that the collecting of comics has become increasingly business-like over the years, comics fandom continues to be a hobby in which fans and professionals are never very far apart. In fact, the professionals are quite often fans themselves, so there is a kind of symbiotic relationship at work here. Unlike the seeming inaccessibility of film stars, rock musicians, best-selling authors, and television personalities, comics professionals frequently rub elbows with fans and collectors at conventions and comic shops. They're available, approachable, and usually easy to talk with. And when one of them dies, it's like the death of a familiar acquaintance, someone whose life and work you've followed and participated in.

Friends and colleagues of both Don Newton and Phil Seuling have come forward with many eloquent words and fond farewells. My own memories of these two men are limited, but reach back to my beginning days in comics fandom.

I think I first knew of Phil Seuling when I attended my first convention, the 1972 Comic Art Convention in New York. Later, Seuling would participate as a dealer in the first comic convention ever to be held in Miami, where I was living at the time. Seuling struck me as an unusual yet charming character, and upon learning he'd once been an English teacher, I wished I'd known such teachers during my school days. From what I knew of him, he was a man of few pretensions, and we all know what he has done to advance the nature and quality of comic collecting. I regret that I never actually spoke with the man at length and that I have no interesting memories of him to relate, but he remains a man to whom we owe a great deal.

The interview with Phil Seuling recently published in WILL EISNER'S QUARTERLY #3 (originally taped on October 27, 1983) should be read by anyone even remotely interested in comics. Beyond offering a rather succinct overview of the evolution of comics and their place in American culture, it also gives those of us who didn't know Phil well a taste of his unflagging enthusiasm and often revolutionary ideas which may well have saved comic books from certain extinction.

Don Newton is another man with whom I had only limited contact, but one whose career in comics I

followed from the start. To the best of my knowledge, the RBCC, published by G.B. Love and later James Van Hise, was the first fanzine to publish Newton's work, and they published a great deal of it, ranging from pen-&-ink drawings to comics to full-color paintings. It was difficult to understand why this man wasn't drawing pro comics, because he was certainly already as good as many working professionals. My own contact with him came when I was attempting to put together a fanzine back in the early '70s. Newton did a full-color painting of Captain America for me, and threw in a pen-&-ink drawing of Tarzan fighting an alligator for good measure. The fanzine never happened, and I later foolishly sold the artwork, something I regret to this day. But I continued to follow his career, from his first pro work at Charlton drawing The Phantom and various horror comics, up through his last job for DC. Like Gene Day, Don Newton was an artist who died in his prime, with perhaps his best work still ahead of him.

There are those who knew Don, and Phil, far better than I, and for whom their passing is a very sad loss. In a letter published in THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE #569 (Oct. 12, 1984), Roy Thomas wrote, "When one reflects on how short life is—Phil and Don were both 50 or under, not many years older than myself—somehow the comics industry doesn't seem very important anymore." I realize that Thomas has far more personal memories of these men than I do, but I think we should remember that both Phil and Don loved comics very much. They'd all but dedicated their life's work to the field of comics. And I don't think they would be very happy to know that their passing had taken any of the joy or importance out of comics, either professionally or as a hobby.

For Roy Thomas, and for many others who knew these men closely, this is a hard time, without question. Death is never an easy thing. But it is our responsibility to carry on as they would have, keeping the faith, doing what we can to make comics and comic collecting as exciting and as interesting as possible, remembering the past, but moving toward a future ripe with potential and opportunity.

It's really a treat having Gil Kane back doing so much new work for DC, most notably SWORD OF THE ATDM, two issues of VIGILANTE, DC PRESENTS ANNUAL #3, and his impressive run in ACTION COMICS. In September, right on the heels of Kane's second VIGILANTE fill-in, we got another Kane fill-in: BLUE DEVIL #7. From the Kane interview I read in THE COMICS JOURNAL #91, it sounds like Gil is all fired up to do some of his best work ever, and every job he turns in seems to reflect his enthusiasm. His art for BLUE DEVIL #7 is no exception, but once again, we run into the old problem of great art and a non-existent story (you may recall my comments concerning the MACHINE

MAN limited series last issue). Now, I've heard about how BLUE DEVIL is such a "fun" comic, but if #7 is any indication, folks who find this book fun must be pretty easy to amuse. And with two guys (Gary Cohn and Dan Mishkin) writing a mere 23-page comic book, you'd think they could come up with something resembling a story. Even in a continuing storyline, a single issue should deliver a cohesive impact, or have some semblance of structure, such as the fine-but-fatally-neglected BLACKHAWK title did. BLUE DEVIL #7 was nothing more than a series of limp character scenes with no character, and the standard superhero posturing. The more I see these various heroes and villains in their silly get-ups, the more absurd the superhero concept seems.

As Gil Kane continues to turn in splendid work illustrating standard scripts, I can't help but imagine what he could do with a really outstanding story, and it's for this reason that I've got very high hopes for the TALLUS OF THE WILDERNESS SEAS maxi-series he's doing with Jan Strnad.

From a new compilation of quotes compiled and edited by Nat Shapiro, titled *Whatever It Is, I'm Against It*, which he describes as a "distillation of venom from the pens of great misanthropes throughout history and in our time," we find the following description of comic books, attributed to one John Mason Brown: "The marijuana of the nursery, the bane of the bassinet, the horror of the home, the curse of the kids, and a threat to the future."

And you thought it was all just a lot of harmless puerile fun, eh?

See you at the racks...oh, and Happy Holidays!



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KIDS' STUFF!

Special STAR COMICS Preview!

Interview with Tom DeFalco, Sid Jacobson and Larry Hama.



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For years the direct sales market and the Comics industry in general have tried to convince the public at large that comics aren't just kids' stuff. This particular stigma has perhaps singlehandedly prevented the medium from gaining the more widespread acceptability and recognition that it deserves, at least in some cases, to have. The industry's much-propounded claim that adults, too, can enjoy comics has resulted in a relaxation of the Comics Code and the creation of several new titles targeted directly to a higher age bracket. Couple that with the proliferation of direct sales shops and the increasing age of the baby boom generation, and the result is that today's audience for comics tends to be, on the average, in their early 20s—much older, in other words, than in years past.

However, one unfortunate consequence of this changing attitude is the fact that the younger reader—traditionally the greatest supporter of the medium—seems to have dropped out of the picture altogether. Direct sales shops tend to cater to young adults, not to children anymore. Both Harvey and Whitman, two great bastions of kids' comics, have folded in recent years, with only Archie remaining as a line conspicuously directed at the younger reader. This situation could easily have dire consequences: should the industry lose the youthful element from its audience, where will the readership be in five or ten years?

Marvel Comics plans to correct this imbalance. With the creation of Star Comics, a line of titles oriented primarily to the children's market, Marvel hopes to nurture that audience that the industry needs for its continued health and survival. Set to debut in December, the Star line features a variety of popular licensed characters, such as STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE and THE MUPPET BABIES, as well as a number of original creations, including PLANET TERRY, RDYAL RDY, and TDP DOG, among others.

In October, I spoke to Star editors Sid Jacobson and Larry Hama and to Marvel Executive Editor Tom DeFalco, who had much to do with bringing the entire Star line into existence. The following is a record of that interview, faithfully transcribed by Bob Schreck, and edited by yours truly.

Many thanks to Sid, Larry, and Tom for taking the time out of their busy schedules to talk to me about Star Comics, and special thanks, also, to Marvel's Assistant Promotion Manager, Steve Saffel, for coordinating the work on this issue's cover design.

— Diana Schutz

DIANA SCHUTZ: To begin, gentlemen, I'd like each of you to describe your own particular roles and responsibilities as regards the Star line, for the benefit of the readers.

SID JACOBSON: At this point, I'll be editing most of the new books in the line: STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE, FRAGGLE ROCK, THE MUPPET BABIES, HEATHCLIFF, GOTALONG GANG, EWOKS, and DREAMS. Then there are four of the original books that I'll be doing: PLANET TERRY, TOP DOG, WALLY THE WIZARD, and ROYAL ROY.

LARRY HAMA: I'm just editing one book, PETER PORKER THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-HAM. I'm coming in from another tangent.

TOM DEFALCO: PETER PORKER is a book that we were kind of forced to do. Larry and I started working on this long before we ever knew we were going to do Star Comics. The first issue was called MARVEL TAILS.

LARRY: It started out to be a one-shot.

TOM: Yeah, it was a one-shot and we never imagined doing another one, but it sold so well that the distributor, Curtis, called us up and demanded the second issue. And this is the first time ever that our distributor has reacted to anything we've done. It really stunned Larry and me because we were called into Mike Hobson's office and he said, "Look, I want to talk to you guys about PETER PORKER," and we figured we were sunk! [Laughter]

Basically, what I do is...those guys do all the work and I just kind of hang around...!

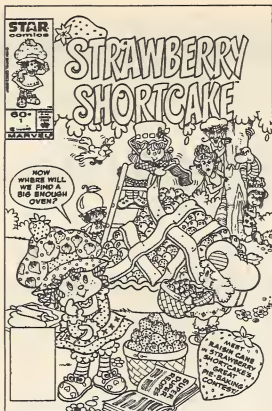
SID: We complain to him.

TOM: Yeah, they complain to me and I write notes and then throw them in the garbage can after they walk out of my office.

LARRY: He's very responsive. [Laughter]

DIANA: But you were involved with the genesis of this whole line of comics, weren't you, Tom?

TOM: Yeah, from the beginning. For the longest time a number of us felt that there was nothing out there for the younger readers, and also that there were no funny comic books being done, and in little half-



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hearted attempts we've tried to start these things on many an occasion, with MARVEL TAILS and a couple of other things which never even saw the light of day, and somewhere along the line Jim Shooter said, "Hey, we think we're going to actually do this."

DIANA: So the entire line was given to you to develop?

TOM: Yeah, and then we got hold of Sid who was leaving Harvey at the time, and that's basically the story.

DIANA: Tell me a little about each of the books.

SID: Well, most of the line at this point consists of licensed characters. With these, what we're doing is starting with their basic premises and trying to truly expand on them and give them a different life, if you will, in terms of a comic magazine. STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE has been the number one little girls' favorite. I think that it's one of the few books that we're doing that has a special younger category. This is not a line, really, that's totally directed to younger kids. It's for a mixed audience, but these are lighter adventure, lighter humor than most of the other Marvel books. STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE is, certainly, directed toward a younger reader.

The Getalong Gang is a group of twelve animals that are really treated as humans; six of them are emphasized. They work almost as a surrogate family for each other, and I think that's part of the reason for its success.

The Ewoks are characters that come out of *Return of the Jedi*, that are now having a life of their own, in a time period that can be translated either way as before *Jedi* or after. We're treating the book almost in a mythological way and it deals with the community of Ewoks themselves without extra-planetary things occurring; it takes place totally on Endor.

LARRY: You mean, of course, that Luke Skywalker and other *Jedi* characters won't be in the EWOKS.

SID: At the moment they won't. It may change! HEATHCLIFF is a tremendously successful comic. The strip is carried in more than a thousand newspapers, it is presently a daily TV show--in New York it's shown twice a day. Heathcliff lives with a family. He's a wild--

TOM: Crazy cat! He also seems to be the Star favorite for some reason.

SID: Well, Gately's strip is so funny, the gags are some of the funniest in comics today. Heathcliff is a cat who doesn't talk, but everyone seems to understand every word he doesn't say! [Laughter] He coaches Iggy Nutmeg, who is the kid he lives with and whose pet he purportedly is, and it's really Iggy who is more a pet of Heathcliff than the other way around. Heathcliff also lives in the world of the mice; his job is to get these mice out of the house, but they also can beat the hell out of him. So it works at many levels, and we are able to create a lot of new situations based on the kind of crazy mixture of lives that are there. It's been fun to work with.

Fraggle Rock is shown only on HBO on TV, but it seems to have an incredible following amongst kids. There are *Fraggle Rock* books and novelties and dolls, and they're selling tremendously. In this world of the Fraggles there are different groups that live independently of each other but together. It's hard to explain but somehow it works, and it works magnificently, as a microcosm of our own world and of the separate groups that work symbiotically but almost unbeknownst to each other. There are the Doozers, whose roles in life are as workers, the Fraggles are the enjoyers of life, and the Gorgs are the strange rulers. Each *Fraggle* episode really has an underlying moral that somehow comes out in all this strangeness.

LARRY: With PETER PORKER we are trying to do something that's accessible on two different levels. We're trying to do a funny animal book that has a storyline and characters that little kids can understand and identify with, with an overlying satirical bent that they might not even get, but that's satisfying to an older audience.

DIANA: A satire of the regular Marvel heroes?

LARRY: It's satire of regular Marvel heroes and satire of society, politics, life in general. For instance, in the first issue the main characters meet up with Ducktor Doom who is capturing people off hijacked airliners and using them as pawns in an experiment to figure out the secret to making a super-successful rock video.

TOM: 'Cause that's where the real money is! [Laughter]

LARRY: It is a story that littler kids can follow and understand, but it has other elements that are thrown in, the superhero elements and the satire elements--we're trying to make it work in both worlds. It's quirky stuff because we've got two really quirky guys working on it. [Steve] Skeates has been writing weird, quirky stuff for years and Mark Armstrong is a new quirky guy! He's going to be doing very weird stuff; he does a lot of sight gag stuff in the backgrounds. He has that sort of Willie Elder approach to his backgrounds and he's a terrific stylist. He's completely new; his style isn't really based on anything that you can point your finger at. He's one of the least derivative guys that we've got coming out of funny books and I think he'll be somebody to be reckoned with in the future.

DIANA: Okay, tell me a little more about the rest of the original, non-licensed line.

TOM: Well, there's PLANET TERRY, which is basically a space saga, a series of continuing adventures which end with a cliffhanger each month.

SID: But each adventure is self-contained.

TOM: The premise is that when Planet Terry is born, he's born out in space in a big rocketship and since there's no nursery in the ship, he's put into the life raft. His father is called down moments after he is born and says, "It's a boy!" and he swings wide his arms and happens to hit the ejection button, so the kid goes flying off into space! So Planet Terry grows up and he's on this quest to find his parents. One can only guess what he's going to do to his father when he finds him! [Laughter] He has this big, green, scaly monster called Omnis and this very sexy female second-hand robot called Robota who become his family as he's out searching for his own family. It's just a wild and crazy and fun saga...

LARRY: Very visual.

TOM: Very visual--just silly, sick things happening on a regular basis.

SID: And touching.

TOM: Oh, and touching. I mean, this is a very sad thing, a kid looking for his parents; we play off human interest, too.

DIANA: What about WALLY THE WIZARD?

SID: He's a young apprentice wizard to the great wizard of the realm, whose name is Marlin, the brother of Merlin. Merlin was the one who went into wizardry, like a fool, but Marlin really understands the future of science and he can't stand it when he gets mixed up with his other brother.

TOM: He's one of those newfangled scientists!

SID: And Wally is a young boy learning the wizardry trade and he comes up with huge problems in terms of learning that trade and of his life as a young man, falling in love and falling in love with the wrong person, who just happens to be the princess.

TOM: It's filled with dungeons and dragons and swords and monsters and goblins, and all sorts of other stuff. We've got a demon whom Wally happens to live with.

SID: His own personal demon.

TOM: His own personal demon who can change his face and becomes Spider-Man in the first issue. [Laughter]

SID: It's set in the days of King Arthur.

TOM: Then you've got TOP DOG.

SID: Top Dog is an absolute genius of a dog, who can speak any language. A young boy named Joey Jordan discovers him in the park; Top Dog is reading a newspaper and bemoaning what's happening in the world, and Joey says, "My God, a talking dog!" And Top Dog says, "Where?!" [Laughter] And he agrees to come home with Joey only if no one else is to know what he can do. So, to the rest of the world, he walks on four legs and goes, "woof, woof, woof."

TOM: Joey has to teach him how dogs normally speak.

SID: That's right! And what we find out more and more is that Top Dog has really had an incredible background.

TOM: We find out that he's been a former world class chef, he used to run a secret agency for the government, he's a computer expert, he has done a lot of

different things. And he's basically hiding out right now because...well, the price of fame! And then there's Royal Roy.

SID: Who's a prince of a boy! [Laughter] He's the crown prince of the country of Cashalot, which is a small but very wealthy nation between Luxembourg and Lichtenstein. He lives in this wondrous nation and has his own pet crocodile named Gummy--a crocodile without teeth. There are assorted characters of the realm that he deals with, and he has his own romantic life and the usual problems of any young prince. The book is played for humor.

TOM: It's kind of an updated version of the Marx Brothers' *Duck Soup*.

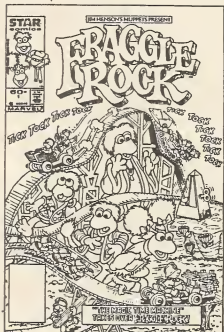
DIANA: You mentioned that STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE is for young girls, and I understand that you're also doing another book for girls: KRISTY by Trina Robbins. Can you tell me about that?

TOM: That's still in the development stage, so it's hard to describe. It's kind of Katy Keene-ish, with some BETTY AND VERONICA thrown in, plus a lot of Betty Boop, soap opera digest, and *Dallas* and *Dynasty*. And it's kinda like a little bit of all those different things.

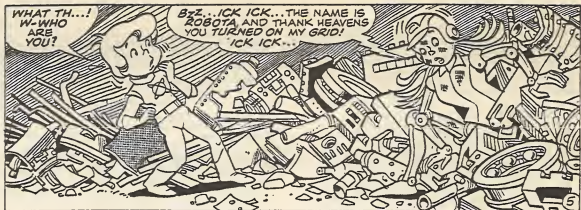
LARRY: But it's not, because it's done by Trina.

TOM: Yeah, it's different from all those individual things. Trina is such a unique talent that her art style is not easily pegged down and her character style really isn't either.

See, a lot of the stuff that we're doing with Star Comics is really going to be different from things people have seen before, because we're dealing with a very strong story content, which is kind of the Marvel contribution, and we're dealing with a very strong visual humor content, which is a lot of the Harvey contribution. (Sid was with Harvey Comics for years.) It's like a meld between two different companies. And there's also a lot of Archie-ish stuff in there because I used to work for Archie Comics. It's not any one of the three companies, but it's kind of a blend. It's the best of all the companies. And then you have PETER PORKER which is...



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Planet Terry meets Robota.

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DIANA: Completely off the wall!

TOM: Yeah! The issue we did as a one-shot was done within certain parameters. It was basically an adventure story done funny-animal style, and the only difference between that and a regular adventure story was the art style. The new PETER PORKER is going to be so totally different from that; the only thing recognizable will be the art style. In terms of content and everything else, this one is so much better than the first MARVEL TAILS. The final product is going to be so offbeat that, in an editorial fashion, there are almost no similarities between them.

SIO: I'd just like to add something about the artists, with regard to the line. I think we've got some of the most superb artists who have ever worked in the field. Warren Kremer, Marie Severin, and Howie Post will be doing many of the books. Warren Kremer is the total "anonymous" guy in the field. He's responsible for every Harvey cover in the last twenty years; he created all of their characters and he is doing the best work in the Star line that he's ever done. He created PLANET TERRY, TOP OOG, and ROYAL RACY. He'll be doing those three, he'll be doing HEATHCLIFF, and he is doing EMOKS right now. And he'll probably be doing more! Marie Severin is doing the best work she ever did. She's going to be doing FRAGGLE ROCK, MUPPET BABIES, and she'll be inking EMOKS. Howie Post, at the moment, is doing work on STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE and some work on WALLY. And Bob Bolling created the artwork on WALLY and is also a superb writer. I think these are some of the best people that have ever worked in the field and I think the artwork is just astounding.

DIANA: What is it, in your opinion, that separates the Star line from other so-called children's comics that we've seen in the past?

SIO: Well, the stories are more important. A lot of the stories that have gone in this area I find are trivial; the situation is trivial, you know what's going to happen, you know how it's going to end up, and it doesn't really matter. We're trying to make our stories matter, in every case. At one point, Tom had used an expression that I think is worth repeating: dealing with the story of Top Dog, it's "Top Dog The Movie" every issue. In other words, the story is that important. There are changes that will take place in the characters and in the set-up, in the same way as changes take place in the Marvel universe. Already there are important changes coming up.

LARRY: It makes the universe that much more concrete.

SIO: So it's not going to be predictable. Also,

artwise, the backgrounds are tremendously important in this and we're taking great care in doing these backgrounds. These are huge steps away from anything that's ever been done before.

DIANA: Granted our industry, for its continued health, needs that child audience, but where does your optimism about the Star line stem from, especially in light of what happened to Harvey and most recently to Whitman?

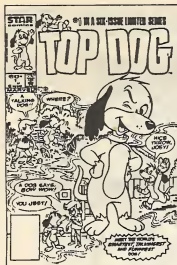
SIO: What happened to Harvey was not because they lacked sales. They didn't have the greatest distribution in the business and they had no direct sales. With it all they did well: their percent of sales was probably the best in the business. So we know there's an audience. And nothing has ever been done like what's being done for Star Comics, in terms of distribution, different ways of distribution, and promotion. It's fantastic.

LARRY: The reason certain types of comics die out isn't necessarily because the audience doesn't want them any longer. A lot of it has to do with the fact that the people who are doing the books lose faith in their audience. That's why there stopped being comics for teenage girls. When romance comics went out, everyone just said, "Girls don't want to read comics anymore." But if there was stuff out there that they wanted to read, they'd read it. And I think we feel this way about all these other genres.

DIANA: Although I'd argue that it's not enough to merely make the books available. There's got to be something more, to make the audience aware of their existence.

LARRY: There's a big difference here; it's the "Tinkerbell syndrome". The reason that people here are confident about this line is the fact that what makes most of these things work, no matter what it is--be it funny animal or a superhero or a children's book--is whether or not the persons that are doing it believe in it. There are books that a lot of people feel are terribly drawn or weirdly written, but they sell because the person who's doing it is into it! You know, heart and soul. That's why we call it the Tinkerbell syndrome: if you believe in Tinkerbell, she'll be alive again. And that's a big basis of our confidence in the line.

TOM: The thing is, our people working on the books are firmly committed to the point that, on occasion, we've stumbled into very vicious arguments about what Planet Terry would do in a certain situation, for example. And once I see those kinds of arguments happening in the office, with people getting bent out of shape about that sort of stuff, I know we're doing



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it right, because it means our people really care one way or the other. And once *our* people care, we can make the *fans* care.

But there are some other things going on with Star Comics, in terms of promotion and so on. First, we are licensing the characters of *today*. When I think of funny animal characters, I think of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck. The kids today really don't know who these characters are. They know Strawberry Shortcake, which has its own fanatical following. They know the Getalong Gang. These are the characters the kids are really into. Now, in terms of promotion--

SIO: The subscription lists...

TOM: The subscription lists are incredible! In two weeks after we announced the Star line, there were 3500 subscriptions! We are also doing the biggest promotion that has ever been done for a comic book line. We have a deal with General Mills that we are being put on eight million cereal boxes, with a Marvel Star comic books free premium on each box.

LARRY: If kids read anything, they read cereal boxes! Every kid in America knows how to spell the word

"riboflavin"! [Laughter]

TOM: We're talking eight million boxes! What's going to happen is that the kids can buy three boxes of cereal, send in the boxtops or the proof of purchase, and they get five free Star comic books. We expect that this is going to end up in the hands of a million and a quarter kids. We're going to put comic books in the hands of a million kids!!!

SIO: This will also be advertised in print and on TV.

TOM: Yes. It's the greatest premium offer that we've ever gotten involved in, and we are convinced that with TV advertising saying "Marvel Star Comics," eight million cereal boxes, and one million kids holding them, a lot of people are going to know about Star Comics.

SIO: And we now know that TV advertising works.

TOM: Yeah! Thanks to G.I. JOE, one of the best-selling newsstand comic books around and the top-selling subscription comic book.

LARRY: It's been berry, berry good to me! [Laughter]



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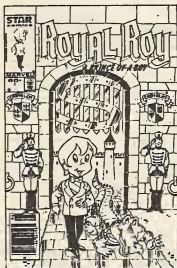
Young apprentice Wally the Wizard speaks words of wisdom beyond his years.

TOM: We're also going to be doing a lot of other things such as the Star line co-op advertising program. We are preparing both print and radio ads, and we are blitzing the media with the fact that we're doing all these comic books.

DIANA: Although it's been labelled the kids' line, you've all brought up the fact that Star Comics work on different levels. What exactly is the target age for the Star line, as opposed to the target age for the regular Marvel line?

TOM: Alright, the answer we tell civilians is with Star Comics we are targeting six to ten-year olds; with Marvel Comics, approximately 12 to 15-year olds. The real answer is if a 20-year old cannot enjoy a Star Comic, we screwed up. Our audience ranges from the age they can read, which is four or five, up 'til 60. And that applies to Star Comics as well as to Marvel Comics.

DIANA: But then, how do you distinguish something that's aimed at this younger target audience from something that's aimed at the supposedly older group?



(C) Marvel Comics Group

LARRY: Subject matter, but you can't even say that because I can pick up A.A. Milne stuff and enjoy it, and I'm 36 years old! I probably enjoy it more than I did as a little kid because now I see all the subtleties in it. And that's the same sort of thing we're doing. I tell my writers that you cannot think of writing down to kids; you write stuff that you would enjoy reading. Once you start writing down to those kids, they know it and they reject it out of hand. The good stuff will always hold up, to whatever age group. Look at the old Marge's LITTLE LULUS right now; they're funny as hell and entertaining, and they hold up. That's the thing to aim at doing, rather than categorizing too much, because then you lose a whole section of your audience.

TOM: Really, in terms of the writing guides, the guide for writing SPIDER-MAN is actually the same one I would use if I was writing HEATHCLIFF. In terms of targeting, those are terms that marketing people use.

LARRY: As far as the editorial view on that goes, we want to just do good stuff.

TOM: And that's basically the criterion. How can you tell when it's good? If it satisfies you, if it makes you laugh, and if you yourself want to know what's going to happen in the next issue, then you know it's good.

LARRY: The only instinct that you can play with is that you try to put out something that you like, that makes you happy.



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GIANTS OF OUR TIME

Greetings and good news for all you Godzilla fans out there! Your humble Long Island Loochie was relaxing in front of the great idiot box the other day, getting my daily dose of news from my favorite station, CNN, when to my surprise there came a report from Tokyo on the making of the latest Toho production. There he was in living color: our old friend Godzilla! After five successive bombs at the box office, our most cherished reptile was laid to rest some nine years ago. But you can't keep a good monster down. Toho has begun the resurrection and plans to unleash the new "Improved" beast upon the Japanese public this December. (No American release date as of yet.)

From what little was shown in the report I can tell you it looks like we can all rest easy. Godzilla looks great. This time, it appears that he has lost his love for mankind and resumed rampaging through the countryside and destroying cities. It seems the studio heads have finally realized that a friendly monster does not sell tickets. Along with the change in direction come some advances in technology. Although the man-in-the-suit technique is still employed, Toho has also built an 18 ft. computer-controlled robot for close-ups. Let me tell you, he never looked better. He is alive! His eyes roll, his tongue is wet and slimy and doesn't just sit there; it moves like every good tongue should! He snarls and it appears as if there are real muscles underneath all that rubber. His teeth are back: big, sharp, and ready to bite.

Now if that's not enough good news for you, then here's some more. An American production of Godzilla has been rumored to begin shooting soon. The word is that producer Steve Miner of FRIDAY THE THIRTEENTH fame has bought the rights to remake the original GODZILLA: KING OF MONSTERS. It has also been rumored that this production will not have either a man in a suit or a computerized robot, but will attempt to bring the "big G" to the screen via stop-motion animation--the same process that brought such luminaries as the original King Kong and Mighty Joe Young to life. Just think: two Godzilla movies! Well, you know what that means. We have to start saving our hard-earned money again to keep up with the forthcoming onslaught of new Godzilla toy imports from Japan.

Now on to another giant of our time. Ray Harryhausen is the man who has done more for the development and advancement of the stop-motion process than any other in his field. Since working with his mentor, Willis O'Brien (creator of effects in the 1933 KING KONG), Harryhausen went on to create a lifetime of entertainment that the whole family could enjoy. His films include THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS, THE 7th VOYAGE OF SINBAD, and THE VALLEY OF GWANGI. With each film he would seek out new challenges to overcome and turn our fantasies into reality. His last film to date was CLASH OF THE TITANS. Although it was not very strong in the plot and acting departments and some of the effects were below the quality one usually expects, the film was a box office smash.

Creating special effects is a very expensive proposition. As time goes on and technology advances, it gets even more expensive. George Lucas' Industrial Light and Magic has had the advantage over Mr. Harryhausen in recent years. This is due to the success of the Star Wars trilogy which has enabled them to experiment with the stop-motion process and take it a few steps further. Basically, what I.L.M. has achieved is very simple. In stop-motion animation a small rubber

articulated doll is photographed a few frames at a time. After each time it is photographed, it is moved ever so slightly. When all these images are projected and shown in succession, they create the illusion of motion. Since the doll is not propelling itself the camera takes a perfectly clear picture every time, unlike under normal filming circumstances when a camera photographs a person walking. In this instance, the person propels himself and the camera runs at a constant speed. Thus the camera must try to keep up with its subject and, if the subject moves too fast, a blurring effect occurs. This blur makes the subject appear to be moving and approximates our real life perspective of motion. In stop-motion animation, however, the blurring effect is lost; consequently, the doll that is filmed moves in a somewhat stiff and lifeless fashion. Although Mr. Harryhausen, through his diligence, has made that effect barely noticeable, I.L.M. has eliminated it entirely through the use of computers. They have been able to put the blur back onto the filmed doll, thereby giving it an even more convincing movement across the screen. This effect can be seen in DRAGONSLAYER and in the Taun-Taun sequence in THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK. This achievement has been dubbed "go-motion".

Well, the ultimate dream was announced in Cinefantasia's Sept. '84 issue. Mr. Harryhausen will head I.L.M. in the production of a sequel to CLASH OF THE TITANS. The new film is titled VOYAGE OF THE TROJANS and is based on Virgil's *The Aeneid*. What a combination: the skilled hands of the master of stop-motion animation and the computer-enhanced "go-motion" capabilities of I.L.M.! No shooting schedule has been announced, but we can assume that the finished film should hit the screen by late '85 or the summer of '86. I'm sure it'll be worth the wait.

Before closing I would like to take the time to mention that BUCKAROO BANZAI was a pleasant surprise amidst the garbage released recently. Even though it was no epic, it still delivered. It's very reassuring to see that John Lithgow, truly one of the premier actors of our time, still has a sense of humor and maintains variety in choosing his roles. The same goes for Jeff Goldblum (INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS '78). In the meantime, I want you all to keep your fingers crossed for OUNE, due to be released in December. I hope that director David Lynch has been able to keep some creative control of the project, despite the flapping jaws of his producers, the De Laurentiis folks. If so, we can expect some really interesting filmmaking along with an epic sci-fi storyline. Now wouldn't that be nice for a change? 'Til next time, take care, Happy Holidays, and keep watching the skies!

JUST TRYING TO BE,

Schreck



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Anything which depends for its existence upon habit (conditioned response) is a manifestation of the repetition compulsion syndrome. Comic strips and books fall into this category. In the major comics industry, superheroes are part of the main product line and they are mass-produced and sold with the same marketing techniques used to sell soap powders and breakfast cereals. As with the morning bowl of Pop Cornies, so it is with the monthly Hulk or Thor or DNAgent. Now, cereals and comic characters have been linked for nearly 50 years, at least since Kellogg's sponsored *Superman* on the radio in the 1940s, and the two have much in common. After eating cereal, one has the illusion of having had breakfast; most superhero comics leave one with the illusion of having seen or read something. I say "illusions" because cereals for the most part have had all the vital nutrition processed away, while the comic superheroes give one the illusion of escape from the daily reality of peers who are more competitive, muscular, and handsome than oneself.

Never has the realm of processed fantasy been better organized to exploit and manipulate the fan, the drone, the compulsive buyer-collector, the weak, the lonely, and, to be sure, the greedy. Media has fused into The One which easily programs, manipulates, and controls the many. There is one giant market for customized fantasy, but it has various branches, each of which is carefully tended. At major science fiction, fantasy, and comic conventions, one sees rooms filled with Tolkies, Trekkies, Smurfies, Elves, Star Warriors, Extra-Terrestrials, and Superheroes. Since these conventions are designed to promote and sell product, individual creativity seldom surfaces. A company image wins the costume contest. "Prizes" tend to be hype for this or that company's product; indeed, what is a convention for the most part but a place where people pay to experience advertising gimmicks? The artists on any given panel are not likely to blow their bread and butter by saying what they really think about seeing their artwork controlled by editorial boards. In the film rooms, one is more likely to see previews of upcoming films (ads) than any original work by new young filmmakers.

Today, the companies have press agents or press reps who keep up a steady stream of product-hype, from prozine to fanzine to the convention freebie table. The press agent's function is to tell you anything you'd like to hear that will influence you to promote and buy the company product, be it Ghost Toasties or Schlepperman. If you look like a greedy

little sh**head, maybe you'll buy the idea that Howard the Worm will be worth its weight in maggots in 20 years and you'll pass that along to the other chumps, and pretty soon the company will be sold out of Worms and can start telling you about what a "Collector's Item" Nerdman is. The '80s are seeing a lot of garage and basement space filled with a lot of useless dreck that isn't going to be worth anything in the future. We all know that the guy who sells us the book will tell us what a good buy it is and what sharp speculators we are, yet when we stroll in a couple of years later and try to sell that Worm back to him, he's got a whole new story. Sorry, he says. Can't use it. Got a whole basement filled with them. They're not selling these days. Company dropped the title and people quit

collecting. Well, you thought that was a box of money you were hoarding, but it turned out to be a box of worms. That teach you anything? I doubt it. Comic buying and collecting isn't rational. It does not exist on a conscious level. It's a mania, a compulsion, something you have to do. At a certain time in the week, you will feel the urge to go to the comic store and buy the latest issues, and you can't stop yourself from going any more than you can stop urinating or eating candy bars or taking valium. Face it. You're a junkie. You've got to have a fix every so often or you get the shakes and break out in a cold sweat. You can't go away on a trip without making your dealer swear on a stack of X-MEN that he won't forget to put aside a mint copy of each of your particular books, and even after he has faithfully promised to bag them for you and keep them in a sack under the counter, you still worry that something like the SUPERMAN ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL will slide into the store and you'll miss your copy, and everyone else you know will have a couple and they'll be sneering at you, poor schlub, with that gap in your collection. Of course, your dealer will always take care of that gap for a few dollars more, but you'll still be a loser to all the guys. It will be like getting in line too late to see the first showing of "Carolina Jones and the Temple of Dung". Like getting a second run t-shirt with The Chitlins on it.

Not me, you say. I can quit anytime. I don't really need comics. I can do without superheroes. Hell, I've got a girlfriend now. Who needs Spazzier in her Skightight Jumpsuit? My girl can sing and jog. Well, maybe that used to be true, but noticing the age of the people who now patronize the comic scene and attend the conventions, I am skeptical. There are a lot of you who can't quit and don't girlfriend, college, whatever; you go on collecting; you go on with the fantasy long past adolescence. *Star Trek* carried you over. Here you are in the audience in your late thirties, watching the same stuff up there. Wider screen. More elaborate technological effects. But there they are: Doc, Scotty, Kirk, Spock, the Klingons, lots of slimy rubber creatures slithering around, all those built-in toy ads. And you like all that stuff just as much as you did when you were seeing the small screen versions back in the '60s. Remember those days when you sat around passing a joint or a bottle of wine while you analyzed the sociological and psychological subtleties of a *Star Trek* plot? You're not going to give that up just because you're pushing forty now; why should you? You got a right, huh? You also have a habit, a trifle on your back.

Collecting that is motivated by greed is doomed to failure. You have to be rich in the first place, and then it's relatively meaningless. Collecting has to have an end, a purpose. That collection once

attained has to have a place. Do you see all those old men sitting behind their Golden Age comics at the cons? That's you someday. And what are they doing there? They don't really want to sell those books. They want you to see that they have them and that they have this or that enormous price tag on them. What good is money if it *won't* buy an ACTION #1 or a MARVEL MYSTERY #1? And what good is a collection everyone has? If there are a million copies of something (SHAZAM #1 comes to mind, heh heh!), its rarity is nil and it is never going to be worth anything in a collection. Look, none of the current products are going to be rare, ever. That's the reality. There are some rare comics out there due to World War II paper drives and other factors, but most of these are now in the collections of the rich, bagged and vaulted, and you ain't going to get your sticky little paws on them, so why collect comics at all? Why not liberate yourself? Burn your worms at a weenie roast. Form Comics Anonymous chapters where you can stand up before other miserable junkies like yourselves and say, "My friends, I was once addicted to superheroism. Had to have a fix every month. Had to have more of those action pages. Had to see the web-crawler swinging around. Had to watch Doc Strange seed rays out of his hands at his enemies. Had to feel that brief moment of invulnerability, to fly with Superman, to have that x-ray vision so I could see what those cheerleaders were hiding in their cashmere sweaters, had to flame on with the Torch and burn up all the a**holes who pushed me around in the locker

room; but, friends, I kicked the habit. I stayed at home on Wednesdays and Fridays. I keep away from the revolving rack. I didn't even look in the door when I went to the grocery store for some hamburger. I gave away my CAPTAIN MARVELS and BATMANS and my (chckle) WONDER WOMANS. I started playing baseball again, running, swimming, riding my bike, meeting girls at the soda shoppe, talking about actual books with no pictures in them, and, lemme tell you, it felt great. Until *Star Wars* came along and I backslid, but I'm still alright. I'm still alright."

Can you beat the brainwash? Can you give it all up? Could you leave the tube off, stay away from movies like Grubbiess, and forget about the SPIDER-MAN #252 you missed because the a**hole ahead of you scooped up the last five copies? Can you do it, clear your head of space wars and Watchers and bloated villains who lounge around among the stars like drugstore cowboys? Can you take Reality? Well, it's been nice rapping with you, but you'll have to excuse me now. I just got a call from a guy who has one of those SPIDEY 252s and he only wants \$20 for it, so I figure...and it's almost time for *Doctor Who* on channel 9 and I have to finish "Indiana Jones and the Maggots of Marin County" and I promised my lady I would stand in line for tickets to that new spectacular by Stephen Spernberg and George Lucre, called "Ewoks on Uranus", then I have to finish indexing my Howard the Worms because I'm sure they'll revive the character in a few years after all the lawsuits blow over and...

CUTEY BUNNY #4

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Marvel Comics has announced plans to adapt the Emmy award-winning (and now cancelled) *Mary Tyler Moore* show into comic book form.

Though the creative team has yet to be chosen, Editor-in-Chief Jim Shooter said, "It will definitely be printed on Ted Baxter paper."

Marv Wolfman and George Perez will collaborate on a new super-team book about kids who put every cent they earn in the bank. Look for THE NEW TEEN TIGHTWAOS soon.

Writer/artist Scott McCloud is doing another project for Eclipse Comics called ZIT!, about a 13-year old hero with an extreme acne problem.

When asked how he thought of ZIT!, McCloud replied, "It just suddenly popped up one day!"

Both Stridex and Clearasil have already purchased full-page ads in the forthcoming epic.

Bobby Drake (Iceman) and Johnny Storm (the Human Torch) have both been reported missing. They were last seen together shaking hands.

In a recent interview, Sergio Aragones revealed that his initial concept for *000 THE WANDERER* was actually a cow-barbarian named MOO THE GRAZER.

After explaining the idea to consultant Mark Evanier, he decided not to go with MOO.

"Mark thought the book would have been an *udder* disaster," said Sergio.

Top five songs by superheroes this week:

1. The War Song -- Kree/Skrulls
2. On The Dark Side -- Spider-Man's Alien Costume
3. Let's Go Crazy -- Klaw
4. Strung Out -- The Elongated Man
5. Cover Me -- Cloak

Hey, it's been real real. See ya next time, same Bat-column, same Bat-magazine!

JIM PINKOSKI: "CRIMINAL" CARTOONIST?

by Jim Pinkoski

It sure looks like my BRIGHT IDEAS strip is going to have an extremely interesting and controversial history to it! In case you are unaware of what has happened, read on...

After working for Comics & Comix for ten years, for a change of pace I went to work for Bank of America as a part-time teller. For a total of five years I worked at two of BofA's branches, one in Davis and the University branch in Berkeley.

Three years ago I began pursuing ideas of how we might be able to change and improve our entire banking system so that perhaps we might be able to solve several major problems our society suffers from: foreclosures, unemployment, inflation, etc. Repeatedly I tried to get the media to cover my ideas. I got three newspaper articles in print up in Sacramento, but no one thought it was important enough to do more on it.

Here in the Bay Area, no papers would even touch it. I spent four weeks picketing in San Francisco, trying to get the media to notice me in the financial district. (I've never picketed before in my life, by the way.) The papers ignored my ideas and my strips.

On June 25th, 1984, which was both my 34th birth-

day and George Orwell's birthday, I closed down the Berkeley BofA where I worked by locking myself in a back room, alone, and demanding media attention. It was a very foolish thing to do, but I was out to convince the media I was serious. It seems the papers were willing to cover my illegal transgressions, but unwilling to print my strips.

Months earlier I had shown these strips to Peter O'Donnell (creator of *MODESTY BLAISE*) and to Garry Trudeau (*OODNESBURY*). Peter wrote back, "I'm full of admiration for your iconoclasm, enthusiasm, diligence, know-how, and drive." Garry said, "...the strip is too didactic..."

Until I find a publisher for my BRIGHT IDEAS strip, Xerox copies will be available at all seven Comics & Comix stores. I won't be closing down any more banks, but hopefully making this project "controversial" will help get it discussed and into print. I freely welcome any comments, compliments, or criticisms.

And how did my court case turn out? I received three years probation and no jail time. Yes, I agree, I was extremely lucky. And I never push my luck a second time!

BRIGHT IDEAS

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AND
**4,600 SAVINGS
AND LOANS**

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SYSTEMS** AND ITS
NUMEROUS LOCATIONS...



... AND
**WE
END UP
PAYING
FOR
ALL OF
IT!!!**

OH SURE, ALL THIS "FREE ENTERPRISE" IS REALLY GREAT... "THE-MORE-IS-MORE" BUT WOULDN'T IT BE A BIT - **WH - LESS EXPENSIVE** TO HAVE A FEW **LESS** OF ALL THESE **MONEY-MAD BANKS??**

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THE **OBSCENE** LEVELS THEY'RE
AT CURRENTLY - COME
DOWN **MUCH LOWER!!**



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COLOR
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SO! WHAT
ARE YOUR
SUPER-POWERS?

AND THIS
IS THE
DEB
COVER!

ORIGINAL
ISSUE!

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WILEY PUNYER

ALL IN COLOR FOR A BUCK-&-A-HALF COLUMN OF CRITICISM & REVIEW

SWAMP THING ANNUAL #2

When Alan Moore began writing SAGA OF THE SWAMP THING, he went back to the creature's origin and cut away some deadwood. The Swamp Thing is not a man trapped in the body of a thing, not a Marvel-style "man"-thing. Moore has given the Swamp Thing an integrity of his own. The creature is a being whose nature is embedded in the swamp. Swamp Thing's life began as the result of a human's death but, under Alan Moore, the character has now figured out that his human memories of Alec Holland are stolen memories. Swamp Thing's intelligence may be borrowed or stolen also, but his mind, as philosophers might say, is a *tabula rasa*. The creature is young in experience, with a mind that does not trickle out what it considers superfluous. Every movement in the swamp is picked up by the Swamp Thing; as a child learns from his experiences, so does the Swamp Thing. But unlike a child, the Swamp Thing is open to the absurdity of the swamp, of life, of incarnate evil; he has in fact seen more mental illness and delusion than sanity and human consensus reality. Were a human to see life as the Swamp Thing does, he would be certifiably insane.

So Moore no longer deals with a human trapped inside a swamp creature. The weak, sometimes melodramatic pathos of this concept is gone; what remains is a one of a kind absurd swamp plant/creature with no desires or goals. His only conflicts are with the environment and the knowledge and experience it gives him. He is emotional, but has no obsessions now that he knows the truth of his origin. But because he is emotional and is trying to live the absurdity of existence, he encounters conflicts. Love - Abby.

The '70s and '80s have been plagued by comic characters who delineate their personalities through self-narrative. Moore's writing thankfully doesn't fall prey to throwaway bits of neurotic monologue. He does not deal in a comic book universe where earth, heaven, hell, and God are defined by the editor-in-chief. Swamp Thing is no longer endowed with comic book musculature: his form is more broken, more textured, more plant-like. The creature that was born of the swamp out of the shape of a man is the swamp; he is the natural, absurd, mystical product of nature. The chemicals that burned Alec Holland were the product of man. The swamp that created the Swamp Thing did so with the magic of nature that man tries to capture through science. The Swamp Thing can deal with the absurd twisting life form that is the swamp, but he is still learning the absurdity of the dreams, goals, and desires of man.

When I started this, I was simply going to raise SWAMP THING ANNUAL #2. I have gone on at length, instead, praising Alan Moore and his redefinition of the title character. Moore is clearly a master story-

teller and stylist, much like Mark Twain, and while the content of his writing may not be as soul-stirring as Shakespeare's, he does present little universal truths without falling into cliché. In the annual, Moore deals a blow to our modern anthropomorphic, emasculated view of God, he takes a swing at the belief of predestination, and he even makes hell more powerful than it ever will be in fire-and-brimstone bible verses. Hell is pain, but lonely pain. "Each soul must enter alone...otherwise how could it truly be hell?" Very nice.

-- TOM HAUNERT

SECRET WARS #10 and AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #259

People have told me at various times about individual comics they read as children that had a great influence on them in later life. In my case, I recall a line from SUGAR AND SPIKE #84 that impressed me a great deal when I first read it. A robot with newly-acquired human traits had just announced that he wanted to run the entire world, and a little computer replied that all human beings felt the same way... "but usually they find out they can't, so they relax and behave themselves. It's called *growing up!*" I get a tad more sophisticated about it these days, but that thought remains near the core of my personal philosophy. After all, it isn't the end of the world not to be Dictator of Earth, is it?

I don't suppose that that comic book affected everyone the way it did me, but I'm very happy that it was there with its gentle message. Looking at comics in general and SECRET WARS in particular, I wonder if kids these days can find similar messages in comic books.

Yeah, I know. Mention SECRET WARS and everybody puts their fingers in their mouth and gags. All the same, it sells like those proverbial breakfast pastries. It's very easy to dismiss SECRET WARS as banal, but that leaves the message inside without any comment. Anyway, the book itself appears to be just about average as far as comic books go these days, so potential elitists will just have to try to impress someone else.

In issue #10 of this mess, a block of concrete falls on Mr. Fantastic. At the same time, Colossus sees on a TV monitor that his beloved Zsaji has also been hurt. The self-sacrificing lug decides to hold his feelings and tell Johnny Storm, the man she loves. Quoth Mr. Storm upon hearing the news, "I've got no time for a chipie now! Reed's hurt!" (Reed is shown unhurt two pages later with no explanation why.)

Now, I laughed like crazy the first time I read that line. Who wouldn't? But the more I thought about it, the worse it sounded. Did Johnny Storm



(C) Marvel Comics Group

the Ditko issues back in high school. DeFalco has brought Peter back to his former confusion without making the strip take a step backwards. Old Parker is just *growing up*, that's all.

Discouraging as I find SECRET WARS, I'm still glad that there's room for a mainstream book like AMAZING SPIDER-MAN to keep an edge of humanity. SPIDER-MAN may well end up influencing some current pre-teen fan in the way so many other comics have touched others in the past. Watch this space in 1999.

-- ERIC YARBER

NEXUS #7

Double your pleasure, double your fun, this one's got two--for the price of one! That's right, folks. Not only will December herald in the long-awaited return of NEXUS to the comic book marketplace, courtesy of First Comics, but this particular issue also features the promised meeting between Nexus and writer Mike Baron's other offbeat creation, the Badger. Got my review copy in the mail today, yes-sir, and thought I'd died and gone to heaven.

The issue begins, thankfully, with a four-page recap and, though space prevents me from filling you in on various plot details, let me assure you that Mike Baron's scripting is a renewed breath of fresh air, liberally laced with tight characterization, and sprinkled throughout with dashes of humor. Steve Rude's art is as clean and exciting as ever, and his Badger is one surprisingly sexy hunk of man! All I can say is: Welcome back!



-- DI SCREAMING

(C) First Comics, Inc.

Nexus returns, with Judah Maccabee and the Badger.

THE SUNNY SIDE OF THE STREET

Just a little space here to mention good things to look for. THE COMPLETE E.C. SEGAR is out. Anyone with an interest in the comic tradition owes it to themselves to step inside the mind of one of the all-time masters of the comic strip.

SPANNER'S GALAXY is a great mini-series by Nick Cuti and Tom Mandrake. Although it has a science-fictional setting, the strip really manages to get across something of the way in which people act and feel. Add a great mystery and great cliffhangers, and you've got solid entertainment for your money.

And hurry up and buy complete sets of JOURNEY and ZOT!, CUTEY BUNNY and THE SPIRIT! Aren't you glad to be on a planet that has so many good comic books and eskimo pies?

-- ERIC YARBER

say that???

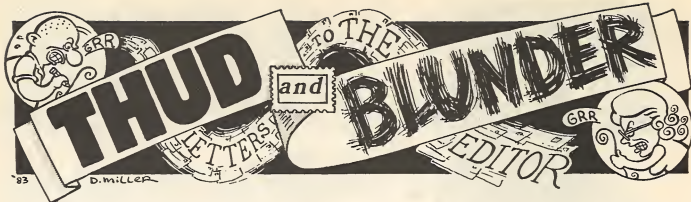
Who cares who wins the stupid war? Both sides are mean-spirited, loutish goons who spend most of their time scowling at one another. No humanity.

I think about comics that have affected people as I see the limply done scene in which Dr. Doom throws a tantrum while his arms and legs are blasted off by some interstellar goon. I don't think comics have to have a nice little moral at the end of every issue like BUSTER BROWN used to do, but the negative view of humanity is so stark in this book that I'm bothered by the fact that people can read it without noticing the tone within.

I'm not just placing SECRET WARS in this category, incidentally. Iron Man quit, Green Lantern quit, the Flash is on trial for manslaughter. More and more villains never get caught. The course of most comic book plotlines is becoming clogged with so much failure that you wonder how these poor heroes managed to survive before their loyal fans took over the industry. The collective writers of American comic books seem to be doing a giant-scale rewrite of J.O. Salinger's short story, "The Laughing Man."

It's very simple how this can come about. Take Spider-Man for example. In his earliest days, Peter Parker was a very endearing character. He was a quiet fellow who was genuinely confused by human relationships. He meant well, but got his signals crossed way too often. Somebody somewhere along the line decided that this made him a "loser," and suddenly the focus shifted. He quickly became a shrill, egocentric, totally unlikeable character, and that's how he remained for years.

Writer Tom DeFalco has been changing that situation lately. In issue #259, Mary Jane Watson finally talks about herself. Wonder of wonders, her story does not involve a super-villain! Best of all, it turns out that she knew Peter far better than he (or we) ever knew her. By telling him that she always knew he was Spider-Man, Mary Jane has forced Pete to face some of the conceits he's held for years. He even realizes that his secret identity is not the most important thing on earth. Other people have secrets, too. This issue was the first time that I found myself identifying with Parker since I read



Dear Diana,

Thanks for the prompt response to my subscription order to THE TELEGRAPH WIRE. After one issue I already feel as if I've gotten my money's worth. And to put us on an even basis, you can consider me of-fended and apology accepted!

Seriously, your interview with Los Hernandez Bros. was greatly appreciated. I had originally purchased the first two issues of LOVE AND ROCKETS when they first appeared, but never got past "BEM" in #1. Now as a devoted CEREBUS, JOURNEY, and AMERICAN FLAGG! reader, I realize I should have given this "alternative" comic more of a chance, especially when I kept seeing great reviews from diverse sources.

Upon reading your interview my curiosity was piqued and I pulled out my copies. I still don't like "BEM", but "Mechanics" and "Heartbreak Soup" are outstanding. In fact, the "Mechanics" novel in #2 is the finest example of graphic storytelling I've seen since THE SPIRIT.

I can't remember being so enthralled with comic book characters and wanting to know more about them. I usually only feel that way about characters in novels. I'd love to see stories of the early adventures of Maggie and Hopey when they first got to-gether. More on Izzy Reubens, too. Anybody who doesn't like the sun is my kind of woman.

I've picked up the remaining issues and have re-served future issues through my local comics shop, and I want to thank you again for an enriching ex-perience.

Now didn't I brighten your day?

Regards,

Bill Harris, Jr.
Spokane, WA

P.S. So you want to be Penny Century? Well, if you get your wish, there's a plane ticket to Spokane for the asking.

You certainly did brighten my day, Bill. Perhaps my greatest single goal with the WIRE is to turn people on to good comics that they might otherwise not pick up, and your letter is proof that we're doing something right. (Now, about that trip to Spokane, let me just clear it with my boyfriend first, okay?!)

Dear Editor,

It was very kind of you to say in #17, Diana, that you felt that your mag could not be "truly legitimate" without a letter from me. (By the way, official "T.M. Maple 'Truly Legitimate'" certificates are available from me. This stylish docu-ment confirms the true legitimacy of your publica-tion and commemorates the moment when it achieved that lofty status. Frame is included, all at the modest price of \$15. Think about it.)

I must admit to being rather confused by your move to the east. You are still apparently the semi-official organ of Comics & Comix, a west coast-based chain. Is there a concrete reason for the move (I mean besides the fact that no one gets any work done in California because they spend all their time at the beach)?

Will the mag now be renamed something like "The Carnation Aroma"? (Sorry.)

I notice that each issue there are plenty of coupons in the mag for discounts on certain types of comics. Besides the usual commercial purpose of pro-mo-tion, etc., I assume that these coupons are also intended to try to get your clientele to expand their horizons beyond the standard Marvel/DC titles. My idea for promoting increased readership (and I can think of a few good DC comics that would benefit from wider publicity) would be to feature a "comic of the month". This particular issue (the current one for the chosen title) would be featured at a reduced rate, say half-price, with it being free in any purchase over a certain limit (say \$10). You might also fea-ture a reduced rate on back issues for the title dur-ing that month. This would introduce many people to this title and presumably garner it many new regular purchasers.

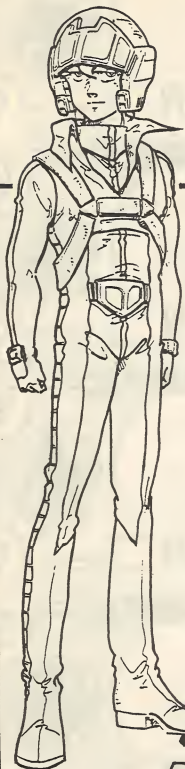
Like Joshua Quagmire, I too am sometimes dis-heartened by the fact that "adult has become analo-gous with smut & trash." I think *part* of the reason for this is the way we label things. We try to pro-ject mirrors from "bad things" (whatever "bad" means in a given context--usually excessive sex or violence) and thus label such products "adult", on the assump-tion that adults are mature enough to deal reasonably with such material. However, we do not try to pro-ject mirrors from "good things" and thus such products are not labelled, even if a child will probably not benefit from reading them we feel they can do no harm. For example, we don't want ten-year olds read-ing *Playboy*, but we wouldn't stop one from reading Shakespeare or Melville, even though such material is likely beyond such an age group.

Yours truly,

"T.M. Maple"
Weston, Ontario, Canada

Your "comic of the month" idea has potential, T.M., and I've passed it to John Barrett--Comics & Comix' head honcho. As regards my move east, the WIRE is still published and distributed by Comics & Comix. The only change is that I'm no longer working out of our California-based offices, but putting the maga-zine together in New York instead. As to why I per-sonally moved to Long Island, well...let's just say I couldn't afford the phone bills anymore! Don't forget our new address: THE TELEGRAPH WIRE, 69 Car-nation Road, Levittown, NY, 11756.

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